NEWS AND COMMENT IN THE WORLD OF ART

By H. McBRIDE.

THE various art exhibitions put forward during the past week have been made up of water colors, drawings, paintings and prints, for the most part of modest dimensions. It may be a hint from the art purveyors as to the approaching holiday season, or it may be in answer to the demand of the public for a choice of works of art that shall be suitable as gifts and that at the same time shall not put too severe a strain upon the wartime purse.

The habit has insensibly grown upon the galleries of late years of giving small exhibitions just before Christmas. Instead of the thumb box sketches of the Katz and Powell Galleries of former years we now have water colors by various artists in the Daniel Gallery, water colors by American artists, many of them, in the Montross Gallery; small paintings by another group of Americans at Macbeth's and lithographs and etchings by Americans in the Milch Galleries.

There can be no objection to the "habit" and, on the contrary, every encouragement should be given to the public to consider the artist and his productions when it comes to choosing Christmas gifts. In a country like this, and in a time like this, where the price of a thing is too much upon everybody's lips, it cannot be too strongly urged that gifts that are redolent of price are never in the best possible taste. Works of art, prints, water colors, drawings, &c., have the inestimable advantage of not suggesting price. Price is not the first thought that leaps into the unruly mind of the recipient of a work of art. The Samuel Pepys of the contemporary world cannot possibly weight his water color and enter it up in his diary as thirty-two ounces, raging intemperately the while that it is not the thirty-six ounces that has been expected.

Whether the Winter Exhibition of the Academy, which at this writing I have not seen, lays any particular stress on small pictures or not I do not know (I fear it does not), but doubtless it should be logically included among the bidders for the attention of Santa Claus, and I wish it much success in selling. By the time these words appear in print I shall have already confided to the readers of THE SUN my general impression of the Academy's wares, but whether it be the worst Academy ever, or the best ever, or merely humdrum like last year's Academy, I shall still sincerely wish it plenty of customers and a merry Christmas. I do believe in buying and selling pictures. The good picture, like the good book, more than makes up for the occasional bad one that you get.

Painter-Gravers of America—Milch Gallery.

The Society of Painter-Gravers of America, which started out last year upon a vigorous campaign to interest the public in the native prints, has had to curtail its activities somewhat this year because of the war. It shows this year's vintage of lithographs and etchings in one room at the Milch Galleries. Although the output is less the quality has not lessened. The same contributors appear and they ought to have the same measure of success.

George Bellows sends three lithographs that exhibit the qualities that are already well known. It is a melange in which good work and bad are mixed, and partisans for or against George Bellows can take their choice. He has his admirers, chiefly, I believe, among the young, who are attracted by his vim. Vim, of course, is not a bad thing, but unless it be supported by wit and controlled by taste it is apt in the long run to grow wearisome. Mr. Bellows's lithographs are admirably designed to catch the eye. As advertisements in the subway or upon elevated railways all travellers would at least look at them once, but it is not altogether sure that they would look a second or a third time with equal pleasure.

Mr. Bellows's "Turkish Bath" is a very gross affair. It is not alone that the bathers are beefy—I believe people go to such places to reduce—but that all the touches in the lithograph are heavy and ponderous. The "Life Class" is filled with extravagant movement that will not bear close study. There is no artistic reason for putting the students into some of the poses they assume, and the impression is left with one that the artist thought it too much trouble, or not worth while, to think out the details. Compare such a plate with Du Maurier's Trilby drawings and see the difference! In the "Initiation at the Front" there is the same lack of knowledge of life that limits the other lithographs and keeps them upon a plane of triviality. As far as the first glance goes this is the best of the three, for the blacks are nicely distributed and the general composition is good; but it bears close inspection no better than the others. The men are hazing a recruit, throwing him into the air from a blanket, but the flying victim has no suggestion of being propelled, and there is no real snap in the men around the blanket. They are drawn amazingly badly, both in spirit and in fact, for they are all out of proportion.

Now it would not be worth while saying this if it did not seem likely to the present writer that the artist could do better, and if it were not for the fact that there will be so many careless people to applaud these prints. One can thrive for a time upon the applause of the careless, but it is not a safe dependence for a serious artist.

Ernest Haskell shows a large number of his etchings, and whatever else he may be accused of it will not be for slighting details. Mr. Haskell runs to the other extreme and requires one almost to study his plates through magnifying lenses. His work is often hard. One must respect it, for so much effort has gone into it, but one does not love it. One or two that Mr. Haskell did in the South, with mosses depending from the trees, are more attractive and have a looseness of treatment that is not usual with this etcher. Doubtless the soft Southern atmosphere melted his rigid Northern soul.

Harry Townsend supplies some prints by a new linoleum (?) process that gives pleasing results; one of Albert Sterner's lithographs, which we reproduce, is evidently a reflex from the emotions of the war; Rudolph Ruzicka sends a charming woodcut in colors, an excellent example of work, and Leo Mielziner is as up to date as possible with a lithograph portrait of Gen. Pershing.

The Daniel and Montross Water Colors.

In the Daniel Gallery one of the water colors by John Marin seems to be very special. It is "The Bay," a circular expanse of blue water, fringed with some Chinese suggestions as to grasses, trees, &c., and overhead there is a cloud or two. The extreme sparsity of evidences of effort will drive some philistines to distraction—or to drink, which is perhaps the same thing; certainly there are some who take the one for the sake of the other. But modern art lovers who happen to live in dry States will be enabled to face Mr. Marin's water color with equanimity, and will suffer no temptation to break their State laws, for the drawing is really distinguished and satisfactory. There is another Marin water color called "Summer" that has distinct possibilities of annoyance for the hoi polloi, for the sky looks like an explosion in a cobalt factory—but it is a decorative piece of work all the same.

Thomas Benton has been given a room to himself, and shows paintings, carvings and decorated china, all of which are interesting in design and color. Mr. Benton's themes, like those of many another, resemble quotations from an old master; but his color is more individual this year than ever it was, and, upon the whole, it may be said that he is progressing.

Mme. Hermine David submits three small Southern landscapes that are romantic and delightful; a vein of poetry can be felt in the modest drawings of Alfred Feinberg; Edward Fiske's water color is full of real landscape feeling, and has good color as well; Samuel Halpert's "Flowers" are sufficiently dynamic for the times we live in, and May Ray, Bror Nordfek and Preston Dickinson are others who send individualized drawings.

In the Montross collection of water colors there are a few interesting drawings signed by new names and some by names that are sufficiently familiar. Among the new people of promise are Louis Bouche, Thomas G. De Laurier, James Dougherty, Alfred Feinberg and Evan J. Walters. Mr. De Laurier in particular exhibits an eye for the picturesque and a praiseworthy tendency to be honest and direct in reporting his impression,

"Princess Diaphanie Blown Away," by Kay Nielsen. Courtesy, Scott & Fowles.

"Lincoln," by Andrew O'Connor. On exhibition in the Jacques Seligmann & Co. galleries for the benefit of the Edith Wharton Relief Fund.

recent work in the Daniel Gallery a few weeks ago, which helped his steadily growing reputation. The chief merit of his work is its quiet sincerity, and sincerity never assists to a noisy acclamation, although it is one of the most valuable assets an artist can have. His color is always good, and so is his sense of design, but it is not of design or color that the spectator thinks so much as of the frank, direct approach to the landscape.

Mr. Laurent made his debut as a wood carver in the same galleries some years ago and had an immediate success with artists. His carvings were much admired and some of them actually were sold. Recently there were signs that collectors in general were beginning to be aware of his work, but his career, like Mr. Fiske's, will now take a different turn. Mr. Laurent's career will not take so abrupt a turn as Mr. Fiske's, as he expects to be a "carpenter's mate," whatever that may be, to a naval aviation corps, and will probably continue to chisel and hammer for a while. Mr. Fiske is to be a mariner.

The Sargent portrait of President Wilson is, it seems, already finished and on public exhibition at the Corcoran Galleries in Washington.

The circumstances under which this notable portrait of President Wilson was painted are of unusual interest.

Shortly after the outbreak of the European war Mr. Sargent generously offered to paint a picture by commission of the highest bidder and to donate the purchase price to the Red Cross. The offer of this unpainted canvas was auctioned at a public sale at Christie's in London and the late Sir Hugh Lane was the highest bidder, buying the proposed picture for the sum of $50,000.

Shortly thereafter Sir Hugh Lane visited this country and on his return journey to England he unfortunately took passage on the Lusitania and was lost when the ship was sunk by a German submarine.

Under the terms of his will all of his works of art were bequeathed to the National Gallery of Ireland, at Dublin, and this picture, though not painted at that time, became the property of that institution and its directors were given the privilege of naming the subject of the proposed painting. They decided that they would like to have a portrait of President Wilson, and notwithstanding the pressure of public duties the President generously consented to give Mr. Sargent the necessary sittings. The portrait was accordingly painted at the White House this fall and was completed within the past few weeks.

Through the courtesy of the directors of the National Gallery of Ireland the trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art have been granted the privilege of exhibiting the portrait in the national capital from December 10, 1917, to January 19, 1918, in order that the many thousands of persons now in that city may be afforded an opportunity of seeing this portrait of our President painted by this distinguished master.

The Macbeth Galleries announce that the exhibition of the work of Arthur B. Davies, which is to be held throughout the month of January, 1918, will be retrospective and represent his activities for the last twenty years and a little over.

All the exhibits will be lent for the occasion, and the entire proceeds, derived from admissions, the sale of catalogues, and so on will be devoted to helping those men belonging to the allied forces who have been blinded in battle. The catalogue will be the finest ever brought out in New York in connection with a one man exhibition.

Indian blankets, Peruvian textiles and Mexican pottery are among the sources revealed in the exhibition of modern designs inspired by primitive arts which opens to-morrow in the west assembly room of the American Museum of Natural History, New York city.

Ever since the beginning of the European war the museum has been extending its work of supplying material for the use of designers of textiles, ceramics and decorations, who had been seeking ideas abroad. Not only the exhibits in its public halls but also study collections and specimens especially gathered for the purpose have been placed at the disposition of designers throughout the United States.

The present exhibition, organized under the direction of Charles W. Mead of the museum scientific staff, is devoted solely to designs made by art students and pupils of the public schools. The work of professional workers was excluded. The display holds high promise for the future of American industrial art, for the designs are in no sense copies, but ingenious adaptations or interpretations.

The influence of the culture of ancient Peru is especially marked. One of the most striking patterns was made by a Chinese student of a New York art school. Its inspiration was a shawl-like garment brought from a tomb in Peru. The mythology of the Indians of both North and South America was invoked by young students in making designs for dress fabrics and wall paper. The beautiful bead work of the red men of the West has served as the basis for many daring and original art expressions.

Hundreds of students, sketch books in hand, have been visiting the museum since last August, when the announcement of the exhibition was made. They found ideas and suggestions not only in the primitive arts but also in many natural objects. The artistic bird groups on the third floor suggested striking combinations of form and color. One of the young designers has ingeniously employed the air sack of the prairie chicken, an orange hued bagpipelike attachment inflated at will from the neck with which the fowl sends forth his booming voice in the mating season. The curved neck of the flamingo suggested the motif cleverly rendered by another youthful exhibitor.

Some of the participants in this exhibition are children from 12 to 14 years old. The public schools of New York are well represented, and there are also excellent examples prepared by pupils of the schools of Paterson, N. J.—"the silk city"—and of other centres noted for the weaving arts.

There are many patterns from the art departments of Teachers' College, Columbia University; Pratt Institute, Brooklyn; the art department of the Young Women's Christian Association and from other art schools and educational institutions.

Otto Fukushima of the firm of Dee & Fukushima is just about reaching the Pacific coast after a long visit to the Far East. He is bringing with him the most important of his finds of antique art.

Certain small objects of art that he discovered have preceded him to America, and are now on view in the galleries. Dee & Fukushima have arranged a special showing of small works of art designed to assist the fastidious in their choice of Christmas gifts.

Last Sunday at 4 P. M., at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Pavel Sochán of Pittsburg gave an interesting illustrated lecture in the Czech language on the subject of Czech-Slovak or Bohemian people's art, preceded by a short address in English on the same subject by V. C. Vondrous, the etcher.

About 1 per cent. of the Czech-Slovak people of the city attended the lecture and examined the exhibits, which are on display in Class Room B of the museum.

The audience was composed chiefly of Czech-Slovak speaking people. They listened with breathless attention for an hour to a highly technical talk on their native art, and lingered to discuss the subject with the specialists present for the better part of another hour.

The extent and depth of culture thus evidenced indicate the quality of our Bohemian citizens.

There was no formal action taken at this meeting, but it is expected that a movement for the training of Bohemian children in the use of museum facilities and the establishment of some definite method of encouraging the art abilities of American young people of Czech-Slovak ancestry will result.

As one of the speakers put it, "The elevation of American taste as shown in the purchase of honestly made articles and the adding of value to the phrase 'Made in America' should be the contribution of her Bohemian citizens to the land that has given them democracy."

A collection of Persian antiquities of unusual qualities has been formed by R. Khan Monif and is now on public view in his galleries. The pieces of faience excavated at Sultanabad and Rhages are already tolerably familiar to students, but the vases and bowls now shown in the Persian Antique Gallery certainly repay study.

A Rhages bowl of the tenth century has a decorative border inside of cufic writing and outside a legend in Persian. The turquoise blue of the bowl has a peculiar soft "mat" given it by its great age, and very different from the usual turquoise blues that are encountered. A vase in the carafe shape dates from the eighth century and bears strong traces of Greek and Roman influence in the design.

An eleventh century bowl bears a portrait of the Emperor Kay Khosrow, with birds and scrolls. The glaze is admirable.

Among the rare miniatures in the gallery are paintings by Baba Shah Isphany, the master of Misail, in which the writing and the painting are equally fine; a fourteenth century fighting piece of the Timul school, a series of forty pictures of the Shah Ismail fighting the Turkish Sultan Selim, and a portrait by Reiza Abbasy of the sixteenth century.

Judge A. T. Clearwater of Kingston has added to his collection of silver and lent to the Metropolitan Museum an important and interesting dish which bears the Paris hall mark of 1789 and the official mark of Henri Clavel, the regisseur general of the period. It differs from most French silver of the period in that it is plain and massive, with a simple fluted border, and rests upon four ball feet. Ordinarily silver of that period is elaborate, even rococo.

This dish is interesting also for its history. Stephen Decatur, the elder, while commanding the Delaware during the hostilities with France in 1798-1799, captured the French privateer La Croyable in West Indian waters, and among the spoils of war the dish came into his possession. He afterward gave it to his son, Commodore Stephen Decatur, who had it with him while he commanded the Constitution and the Congress during the war with Tripoli.

Subsequently the Commodore had it with him on the United States when in 1810 he hoisted his broad pennant as Commodore of the Southern station, and it was with him on his ship President during the war with England in 1812 and in the war with Algiers when he captured the Algerian frigate Mashouda and the Algerian brig of war Estidio. Engraved upon the front of the dish is the simple inscription "Decatur" in a wreath of oak leaves.

Notes and Activities of the World of Art

Two prominent artists of the younger group, Edward Fiske and Robert Laurent, enlisted during the past week and both have been assigned to naval duties.

Mr. Fiske gave an exhibition of his

"The Mother," by Albert Sterner. At the exhibition of the Painter-Gravers of America.